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ABSTRACT

A practicum was designed and implemented to foster 24 second graders' literacy and language development via child-centered as opposed to curriculum-centered experiences. The primary goal was to improve students' quality and quantity of writing by allowing extra time, much exposure to more and various non-basal literature, hands-on activities, and experiences geared to their interest level. The second aim was to improve their attitude toward reading by having them cooperatively and actively involved in a uniquely child-centered environment. Pre/post quality and quantity of writing tests and pre/post attitude surveys were administered. Journals, charts, and a log were kept. The number of library books, records, and tapes were increased and changed weekly. Students were assisted in project work, total and small group activities, and field trips. Conferences, mini-lessons, peer tutoring, mapping, brainstorming, and modeling occurred. Students wrote drafts, proofread, revised, and rewrote, while keeping their own writing portfolios and daily language arts sheets. The class newspaper, pen pals, and big book experiences proved rewarding. Total school and parent involvement added support. Results of the quality and quantity of writing tests showed a marked improvement and an increase. Reading attitude surveys revealed a positive dynamic increase. (Seven tables of data are included; 32 references and 2 appendixes--containing evaluation instruments and a letter to parents--are attached.) (Author/SR)

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Nurturing Second Graders' Literacy and Language Development Through Child-Centered Versus Curriculum-Centered Experiences

by

Gwendolyn C. Esch

Cluster XXX

A Practicum II Report presented to the
Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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This practicum took place as described.

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This practicum report was submitted by Gwendolyn C. Esch under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova University.

Approved:

July 29, 1991
Date of Final Approval of Report

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This practicum is dedicated to the loving memory of my parents.

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ABSTRACT

Nurturing Second Graders' Literacy and Language Development Through Child-Centered Versus Curriculum-Centered Experiences. Esch, Gwendolyn C., 1991: Practicum Report, Nova University, Ed.D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood. Descriptors: Primary Education/Elementary School Students/Classroom Management/Teaching Strategies/ Reading Instruction/ Reading Program/Writing Instruction/Writing Program/Cooperative Learning/Reading Achievement/Writing Achievement/Teaching Methods/Curriculum/Writing Research/Reading Research/Whole Language Literacy/ Cooperative Education.

This program was designed to foster second graders' literacy and language development via child-centered as opposed to curriculum-centered experiences. The primary goal was to improve students' quality and quantity of writing by allowing extra time, much exposure to more and various non-basal literature, hands-on activities, and experiences geared to their interest level. The second aim was to improve their attitude toward reading by having them cooperatively and actively involved in a uniquely child-centered environment.

This writer administered pre/post quality and quantity of writing tests and pre/post attitude surveys. Journals, charts, and a log were kept. The number of library books, records, and tapes were increased and changed weekly. The students were assisted in project work, total and small group activities, and field trips. Conferences, mini-lessons, peer tutoring, mapping, brainstorming, and modeling occurred. They were allowed choices. Many and various audiences were involved during presentations. They wrote drafts, proofread, revised, and rewrote; while keeping their own writing portfolios and daily language art sheets. The class newspaper, pen pals, and BIG BOOK experiences proved rewarding. Total school and parent involvement added support.

The outcome of the practicum was meaningful and a success. The results of the quality and quantity of writing tests showed a marked improvement and an increase. The reading attitude surveys revealed a positive dynamic increase.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Work Setting and Community

In a public elementary school located in the southwestern section of the United States, a problem existed concerning the lack of developmentally appropriate support given to second grade students for their literacy and language growth. The school was in a suburban neighborhood on the outskirts of a major urban city. It was a part of the fourth largest school system in the United States. The school consisted of kindergartens through fifth grades. The total school population was six hundred and fifteen students, which was average compared to other public elementary schools of the same size. The total population of the second grade was one hundred and fifty-two students. It had the largest population of the six grade levels. Ten second grade students attended either or both remedial reading/math classes full or part time five days a week. The approximate ethnic composition of the student body was as follows: (a) White, Non-Hispanic - 10%, (b) Hispanic - 10%, (c) Black - 80%, and (e) Others - 0%. The student attendance ranged within the top 25% of all the county elementary schools. The school had had no school dropouts. It did not have families who were part of the seasonal

migration force or part-time state residents. The school's total full-time staff consisted of 40. Twenty of the 40 staff members were classroom teachers; plus, a counselor and one assistant principal. Total part-time staff consisted of 16. All the teachers held state teaching certificates in the area or subject which they taught. The teachers' state teaching experience averaged 11 years. Forty-seven per cent of the teachers held Masters or higher degrees.

The school was twenty-six years old. Fifty-three per cent of the students received free or reduced lunches that were prepared in the cafeteria. The clinic was undersupplied. A six-pack was located close to the main building and contained the fourth and fifth grades. The total school was attractively painted, air-conditioned, had security lighting in the hallways, and security screening on the windows. Plans were to expand the parking lot, recarpet the six-pack and the kindergarten classrooms, and obtain three portables. For the past five years, the school's population had been steadily increasing. Thus, causing the reason for these recent plans. Due to overcrowding, the art, music, and Spanish teachers did not have rooms of their own. They traveled from room-to-room with their little carts loaded with materials. The huge athletic field had an uncovered hard court, a small physical education shed, six basketball poles and two monkey bars. Money obtained from the sale of

school pictures and candy had been earmarked for the purchase of athletic equipment.

Many and various programs were offered. Besides the standard academic programs, the school offered the following: (a) English for speakers of other languages, (b) Spanish for Spanish speakers, (c) Spanish as a second language, (d) Bilingual curriculum content, (e) Compensatory education, and (f) Exceptional resource classes. The major program in the lower grades was the Primary Education Program (PREP). It was to assure that all kindergarten through third grade students in the state would have an individualized program to permit development to their maximum potential. Plans for expanding this program in the upper grades were underway. The school had an active physical fitness program. Students were scheduled into the computer laboratory and media center on an eligibility basis, which was determined by the classroom teacher. Severe behavioral problems were minimal compared with other elementary schools in the area. Parental involvement in school and student affairs was encouraged, but there was not as much involvement as the staff anticipated each school year. The Parent-Teacher Association had a very low parent membership. However, when total school programs were given, there were large parent turnouts.

There were many single-family homes near the school which had "For Sale" signs in the front yards. The majority

of students who attended the school lived in a huge apartment complex that had a reputation for being the site of many domestic and drug related problems. It appeared that many of these children were being raised by a single parent. In many cases, by an unwed mother who gave birth in her teenage years. Some of the children came from very unstable homes. The school's breakfast and after-school programs helped.

The target group was this writer's second grade class, which was comprised of twenty-four students. The main characteristics of this target group were typical compared to other classrooms of students in the same school and in other schools surrounding the northwestern city area. All of the students were Black, seven and eight year olds. They emerged from a background that was low-average to low socio-economic level. The students exhibited similar developmental traits. They needed an integrated language arts program that offered many and various child-centered experiences. Their quality and quantity of writing was poor. They needed to improve their oral language skills and their attitude toward reading and writing needed to improve.

Writer's Work Setting and Role

The implementor's role was educationally oriented and diversified, while operating within the work setting. The

implementor taught a second grade class in a sufficiently furnished, cozy, well equipped and supplied, regular-sized, self-contained classroom. Coordinating the classroom reading and writing program was among the implementor's major roles. Planning, instructing, and evaluating the language arts program in the class was a vital role. Administering reading and writing tests, maintaining a harmonious class rapport, scheduling, and having conferences with parents were other roles of importance. The writer supervised the work of an aide during the one hour per day that she was available. The implementor was the second grade chairperson - monitoring three other second grade teachers and was the book chairperson. Another responsibility was that of total school's Teacher Education Center (TEC) representative and Tiger Cope representative. The writer was assisting in planning the proposal for an on-site School Based Management/Shared Decision Making Project and was chairperson for three service committees.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

The major problem was that second graders did not receive support for their literacy and language growth that is developmentally appropriate. Specific details of the problem could be clearly cited in the local situation. The majority of students' mornings were spent in teacher-directed reading groups, participating in whole group discussions, listening to whole group lectures, and silently working individually at their desks on paper-and-pencil practice exercises or worksheets. Only the children who completed their seatwork early were rewarded by being allowed to visit an understocked, antiquated interest area or to attend the one and only learning center - a listening station - within a controlled time period. The materials that were available were limited and primarily basal readers, textbooks, workbooks, and pencils. Only on rare occasions were students permitted to help each other with their work and were penalized for talking and leaving their desks without permission. Reading was taught as an isolated subject focused primarily on the basal reader. Language, writing, and spelling instruction was focused on workbooks. Writing was taught as grammar and handwriting. Each subject was taught separately within controlled time periods.

In an attempt to solve this problem, the curriculum was integrated so that learning could occur primarily through projects, learning centers, and playful activities that reflected up-to-date interest of children and allowed the children the opportunities to read a wide variety of literature, draw, plan, discuss, dictate and/or write. They learned facts in a meaningful way, worked cooperatively with each other, enjoyed learning and were taught skills while they accomplished the various projects. A well-planned and prepared environment was structured that offered the children an opportunity to learn through active involvement with each other, tutors, and with materials and included frequently changed activities in many learning centers. More opportunities were offered for writing, reading and developing oral language skills. The materials and activities used for learning were concrete, real, and relevant to the children's lives. They were exposed to puzzels, up-to-date juvenile magazines, blocks, puppets, clay, paint, magic markers, various arts and crafts materials, tape recorders, computers, and scientific equipment. Individual students or small groups of children were expected to work, learn, and play cooperatively with peer tutor, resource people or alone in a variety of work places and spaces - including the learning centers - and on various teacher/children developed projects that the children chose for themselves or were

guided to by the teacher. The teacher provided generous amounts of time and a wide variety of interesting, enjoyable projects, games, and activities for the children to develop reading, writing, oral language, and spelling abilities. The children were taught technical skills or subskills as needed by individual children and small groups of children. The teacher's edition of the basal reader series was used as a guide to plan projects, skits, plays, hands-on activities, and experiences relevant to what was read. Learning situations were structured through an integrated literacy and language arts program. The children were taught in a well organized and child-centered environment.

Children were taught reading strategies that they could use while applying the reading skills that they learned. The teacher applied strategies that integrated the language arts curriculum. The literacy and language arts program needed to be expanded, restructured, and centered around children's interest and experiences. Second grade students were not receiving the appropriate developmental support that they needed.

Problem Documentation

There was evidence to support the existence of the problem. The Public Schools Director of Language Arts and Library/Media Services issued a memorandum to school principals (Glazer, 1990) citing the 1989-94 District

Strategic Plan and reminded them to encourage all teachers to provide frequent oral language experiences as a basis for improving reading and writing.

The city's major newspaper printed an article written by a staff writer concerning the county's only totally integrated reading/writing public elementary school's total reading scores. The staff writer, Landers (1990) stated, "Reading scores over the past four years have risen six points on the Stanford Achievement Test. . . . Crestview students score in the 94 percentile in state student assessment tests" (p. 1E). The reading/writing school offered exclusively child-centered learning experiences. This writer's school offered primarily curriculum-centered learning experiences. Comparing the two schools' scores on the same tests and during the same time periods, the reading/writing school excelled - six points versus four points and 94 percentile versus betweeen the 50-75 percentiles.

A personal interview was conducted by this writer with the principal of the reading/writing school which revealed informative facts about this modern school and a basis for comparing the two school's students' Stanford Achievement Reading Comprehension Test Scores. Both schools had students working on relatively the same ability levels and the second grade student population was approximately the same. The reading/writing school focused it's main attention on teaching reading, writing,

language and other academic skills through writing. It had been a magnet school since 1988, was the only magnet school in the county and possibly anywhere in the country It was the only elementary magnet school in which the entire school was involved. It was in the forefront of the trend among educators and textbook companies to begin emphasizing writing skills. The reading/writing school's students' reading comprehension mean score increased from the 43 percentile (1987-88) to the 58 percentile (1988-89) on the Stanford Achievement Test compared to this writer's school students' reading comprehension mean score which increased from the 44 percentile (1987-88) to the 52 percentile (1988-89) on the same test. This school which offered many and various child-centered experiences through writing increased its mean students' reading comprehension score fifteen points compared with only an eight point increase at this writer's school, in one year. The same teaching methods had been used at the reading/writing school for the past three years (Witlin, 1990).

Further data to support the existence of this problem was available. Large number of children produced low reading subtests scores which placed the students in the lower percentile ranges as shown in Table 1, Total Number of Second Grade Students Grouped in Four Percentile Ranges Based on Four Reading Subtests Scores Compared to the Mean

Table 1

Total Numbers of Second Grade Students (115) Grouped in Four Percentile Ranges Based on Four Reading Subtests Scores Compared to the Mean National Norm (50)

County Public School Standardized Subtests Data

Subtests	Percentiles			
	1-25	26-50	51-75	76-100
Word Reading	44	22	24	25
Word Study	51	39	14	11
Reading Comprehension	29	32	30	24
Total Reading	45	37	22	11

Note. Students were taught and tested in four traditional curriculum-centered classes. Above tests were administered April/1988.

National Norm. Many students' low reading subtests scores placed them in the lower stanine ranges as shown in Table 2, Total Number of Second Grade Students Grouped in Four Stanine Ranges Based on Four Reading Subtests Scores Compared to the Mean National Norm. Second grade students received too little time involving child-centered experiences as shown in Table 3, Approximate Percentage of Classroom Weekly time Involved in Child-centered Experiences by Twenty-five Second Graders. Second grade students received too much time involving curriculum-centered experiences as shown in Table 4, Approximate Percentage of Classroom Weekly Time Involved in Curriculum-centered Experiences by Twenty-five Second Graders.

Teacher observation revealed that students exhibited negative attitudes toward reading.

Causative Analysis

The major causes for the neglect of child-centered learning experiences were that students were not offered many and various experiences that were child-centered and were not allowed enough time to merge reading, writing and thinking skills in developing their literacy and language skills. Teachers felt restricted in applying child-centered experiences due to reading that had curriculum-centered basal readers and their components; such as, workbook and

Table 2

Total Numbers of Second Grade Students (115) Grouped in Four Stanine Ranges Based on Four Reading Subtests Scores Compared to the Mean National Norm (5)

County Public School Standardized Subtests Data

Subtests	Stanines			
	1-3	4-5	6-7	8-9
Word Reading	42	38	17	18
Word Study	50	59	11	4
Reading Comprehension	25	54	25	11
Total Reading	39	52	17	6

Note. Students were taught and tested in four traditional curriculum-centered classes. Above tests were administered April/1988.

Table 3

Approximate Percentage of Classroom Weekly Time Involved in Child-centered Experiences by Twenty-five Second Graders

Experiences	Percentages				
	0-5	5-20	20-40	40-50	50+
1. Planning, writing and orally sharing projects.	*				
2. Selecting and reading literature of student's choice - sustained silent reading.	*				
3. Writing and reading a story of self-chosen topic.	*				
4. Visiting: listening, play, writing/reading centers.		*			
5. Engaging in language arts games and activities.	*				
6. Writing and acting out activities for total group.	*				
7. Sharing classroom library books in small groups.	*				
8. Work with informal tutors.		*			

Table 4

Approximate Percentage of Classroom Weekly Time Involved in Curriculum-centered Experiences by Twenty-five Second Graders

Experiences	Percentages				
	0-5	5-20	20-40	40-50	50+
1. Reading basal readers - in teacher directed reading groups.				*	
2. Listening to whole group lectures.			*		
3. Participating in teacher initiated discussions - total class.			*		
4. Pen-and-pencil practice of skills exercises.				*	
5. Accomplishing dittoed worksheets (check, circle or fill in answers) and workbooks.				*	
6. Individual seatwork talks with teacher.		*			
7. Write independantly at own desk on tests and quizzes.			*		
8. Attending school library, after completion of of required seatwork.		*			

skill sheets. Sometimes, teachers were required to use reading and writing materials that they did not feel were suitable to their students' needs. More and various non-basal materials were needed in each classroom for the students' and teachers' use. Teachers should have been given an opportunity to use reading programs that were not basal components. Mandated daily time allotments per subjects offered a schedule that was too rigid and no opportunity to enrich and expand their literacy and language program. Administrators focused too much time mandating the use of basal readers and too little time toward helping to build teachers' confidence in their own creative ability in implementing strategies. Too much emphasis was placed on standardized test scores, letter or numerical grades on the report cards, testing, and skill drills.

Teachers should have taken time to listen to children, talk with them on an informal basis, and offer them opportunities for child-centered learning experiences. Children should have been given praise often, so they would have had a high self-esteem and been proud of their accomplishments. They should have been encouraged to share their experiences which could have served as a strong motivating catapult for offering ideas for future experiences.

Relationship to the Problem to the Literature

The acquisition of literacy and language skills is a

slow, steadily growing process. This process needed extra time and support, especially in the primary grades. Adults that were close to the problem had concerns regarding beginning reading instruction.

Paris & Jacobs (1984) eloquently expressed the following:

> Learning to read is a sign of literacy and a gateway to education. It involves mastery of a rich variety of skills and is not accomplished quickly or easily. As a consequence, reading instruction is a large part of the educational curriculum during the early school years and is a basic concern of teachers, parents, and researchers. (p.2083)

Perhaps this concern would not have been, if it were felt that young children were getting the proper developmental support that was needed for their literacy and language growth.

Writing is a wonderful way of expressing oneself. So often, it is used as a thinking tool. Bland & Koppel (1988) concluded that at times, educators should allow experimentation to supersede accountability as their prime concern. It is important that children write frequently, choose their own topics, and occasionally allowed to write in a mode of their own. They should be granted time to plan and review their own work together, share writings with many and various audiences. Imaginative forms of writing should be accepted and graded narratively.

It appeared that when children felt and were shown that adult appreciated their opinions, experience, and thinking ability their self-esteem, work habits, and work seemed to flourish. Landfried (1988) stated, "By drawing students out and relating the concepts and material in our courses to their lives, we enrich our curriculums, our students, and ourselves". (p. 35)

In many cases, teachers appeared skeptical about using literature for reading instruction. Personally, it had been successful and very helpful, especially when it was used to enrich the basal reader materials. Hanzl (1985) suggested that teachers lacking in juvenile literature knowledge should seek the assistance of the school or public librarian. This writer felt that teachers should encourage the children to visit the library often and secure their own library cards. Lamme (1987) explained that children who are enthusiastic readers by the beginning of the fourth grade will continue developing their reading competence in the upper primary grades. It was this writer's belief that children should be offered many and various trade books to read and enjoy and allowed choices concerning the literature that they were going to read and write about. Higgins (1986) averred that when children frequently read non-basal materials, they are less confused when reading more complex articles. It was felt that reading and writing could be successfully taught through art and music. Little song sheets

were written for the children to read while they sang. They wrote the words to their own songs, plays, and skits. They made little costumes, painted scenery, illustrated their own books, and decorated their own letters. Siegel (1984) concluded that research and theory have shown the importance of linking art activities with beginning reading and writing instruction.

Raphael & Schwartz (1985) explained how children's vocabularies could be enlarged and unfamiliar concepts mastered by teaching them strategies. One method that was applied to vocabulary development was the use of semantic word mapping. When the children were helping the teacher develop a word map they were reinforcing the use of familiar words and learning new words and their meanings as well. These words were used later in their writings and helped to strengthen their reading fluency. Brainstorming and modeling were also applied during word mapping. These strategies were used by the children when they worked one-on-one, in small groups, and in total group activities.

It was noticed that when children maintained their own work folders that they took greater pride in their work and developed better organizational skills. Wolf (1989) stated the importance of children maintaining portfolios of their work for use in frequently evaluating their own work and allowing teachers the opportunity to obtain a fresh insight of their teaching endeavors.

Children were allowed to function in an environment that was well structured. They were encouraged to orally interact and work in small groups. Learning took place through reading and explaining their own writings, listening intentively to others, and sharing questions and answers. Johnson, D., Johnson, R. & Yager (1985) concluded that by applying cooperative learning procedures in the classroom, it could be an asset to teachers in enriching comprehension and rememberance of the lesson taught. Thus, small group and one-on-one work as opposed to total group and independent work appeared to be quite rewarding.

Rather than adhere to a rigid schedule, it was felt that children should have been offered a flexible schedule in which they were allowed time to give concentrated thought to and absorb what they were taught. Gettinger (1985) presented strong evidence supporting the importance of spending or allocating sufficient time for learning in school. Time was granted for children to explore the wonder of nature and hands-on experiences, to experience pleasure in making topic choices of their own in writing, capture delight in choosing the real literature that they read, and feel pride in preparing and sharing their own projects and presentations.

Quite often children had difficulty expressing themselves both in spoken statements and in writing. They had difficulty explaining story plots, why things happened,

and how situations occurred. Depicting the sequence of an event was overly challenging for some children both in their illustrations, oral presentations, and written work. They had trouble describing the main idea of a story, possible story endings, how characters would respond to a given remark or situation, and clarifying their ideas. Therefore, when children's written work was evaluated on the basis of one assessment tool - such as, "open-ended", it was felt that this was unfair to them. Many and various assessment tools were used in evaluating children's work. Roger & Stevenson (1988) suggested that teachers develop a variety of assessment modes. Teachers could use children's drawings, their construction work, and dramatic play as other forms of assessment.

Many young children were exposed to a dull, drab classroom. They were surrounded by desks, chairs, and text books. Their bulletin boards reflected outdated, unattractive posters that were rarely changed. This writer felt that a child's classroom should reflex a "child's world". Thus, the children were surrounded with articles, materials, magazines, and trade books that interested them. The classroom was attractively decorated and colorful. The bulletin boards showed <u>their</u> work. Interest corners, work centers, and stations for ... listening, reading, writing, and sharing existed. This child-centered, classroom environment served as a strong motivating factor in their literacy and language development. Turnure & Higgins (1984) stated that

interacting within an environment filled with varied sources of sensory stimulation helped to develop children's cognitive skills. However, there were many demands put on these young children's attention. The children were observed and their work setting well monitored. Goodman (1982) cited the importance of "Kidwatching". It was hoped that by having a child-centered environment, the causes for the social and non-social distractions would be reduced.

Literature revealed that there were far more major causes why children were not receiving the appropriate developmental support that they needed in strengthening their literacy and language growth.

In many classrooms, curriculum-centered instructional models were and still are embraced by educators. WHY? Pearson (1985) explained the following:

> There are several forces at work. First, the press for accountability and minimal competencies forced us to be accountable for something. And we opted for all the bits and pieces rather than the entire reading process. Secondly, the notion of mastery learning, . . . made such a system seem reasonable. Third, our friends in publishing unwittingly aided and abetted the movement by providing seductively attractive materials and management schemes. (p. 736)

As much as teachers may hate to admit it, these reasons appeared sound. It was time that old skills modes of teaching

(the way that older, experienced teachers were taught to teach) gave way to the more innovative and new modes. They have been researched and proven to be successful. As an educator, it was time to accept the change and implement it in the classroom.

Quite often inappropriate practices occurred in reading programs. These practices did not support children's literacy and language development and did not offer an integrated child-centered curriculum.

Bredekamp (1990) stated the following:

> The goal of the reading program is for each child to pass the standardized tests given throughout the year at or near grade level. Reading is taught as the acquisition of skill and subskills. Teachers teach reading as a discrete subject. . . . Language, writing, and spelling instruction are focused on workbooks. Writing is taught as grammar and penmanship. The focus of the reading program is the basal reader, used only in reading groups, and accompanying workbooks and worksheets. (p.70)

Here again, we had causes for the problem that educators may dislike admitting occurred.

Innovative programs were conducted and teachers kept journals in an attempt to make educational changes in support for instructional development. The reflective journal process caused an anonymous teacher to observe

and comment.

Red & Shainline (1987) stated the teacher's response:

> The conflict is tremendous . . . and it's all based on differences in philosophy. The district is putting on pressure to raise those test scores - to isolate skills, to drill our children, to prepare them for standardized tests - and then turns around and puts out curriculum guides and implements programs that promote "holistic" education. (p. 39)

This writer agreed with the above comment. It appeared that it was time for the district to consider making changes in curriculum guides and programs that would have been more developmentally appropriate toward supporting children's language and literacy growth.

Literature revealed different aspects of learning that were nurtured during the implementation of this practicum. In a child-centered educational setting, the students' cognitive development increased through having to employ thinking skills; such as, planning projects, being read to, reading, writing, and orally sharing their reports, stories and experiences. The students' aesthetic development was enhanced through art, music,poetry, and creative problem solving. Guidance was provided for the children's social-emotional development. Students were provided with many and various activities that interested and motivated them. Children were encouraged to make

individual as well as small group and total group choices when choosing projects, real literature and language arts activities. Children were granted time to complete their work, attend small (skills) lessons, make special visits to the library to make reports and/or play educational computer language arts games, and to have private conferences with the teacher or a friend. The children were given the opportunity to plan, prepare, and share plays, skits, choral readings, and their own written work with many different audiences. The students' moral development increased as values were generated that encouraged them to build self-confidence and wisdom.

In summary, literature findings that dealt with the problem cited that learning to read was a sign of literacy and a gateway to education and that educational curriculum during the early school years was a basic concern of teachers, parents, and researchers. Literature revealed that at times, educators should have allowed experimentation to supersede accountability as their prime concern, accepted many and various modes of writing when assessing children's work, and should have graded written work narratively. Literature suggested drawing students out, listening to and talking with their students. It was stated that teachers should have appreciated their children's opinions, experiences, and thinking ability, while praising them often. It was cited that librarians should be consulted often by the teachers

concerning children's literature and the use of it in the classrooms and that children should have been encouraged to read non-basal literature and to visit the library often. Literature supported the use of art and music activities in the classroom and expressed that these activities have been successfully linked with beginning reading and writing skills instruction. Based on recommendations averred in the literature, the children were taught stategies that they employed in vocabulary development and allowed to maintain their own work portfolios. Their classroom environment was well structured and child-centered. Cognitive skills were developed as the children were allowed to interact within a child-centered, colorful, attractive environment. Observing and monitoring were of importance in the teacher's daily activities.Schedules were flexible and time was allowed the children for apt thought and learning.

Causes of the problem were cited in the literature: (a) The press for accountability and minimal competencies, (b) The notion of mastery learning, and (c) Publishers provided seductively attractive materials and management schemes. Conclusions revealed that inappropriate practices were being applied in many reading programs: (a) The goal of the reading program was for each child to pass the standardized tests; (b) Reading was taught as the acquisition of skill and subskills; (c) Teachers taught reading only as a discrete subject; (d) Language, writing, and spelling

instruction were focused on workbooks; (e) Writing was taught as grammar and penmanship; and (f) The focus of the reading program was the basal reader, used only in reading groups, and accompanying workbooks and worksheets. Through observation, an anonymous teacher reflected a personal view of why "holistic education" was being promoted.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

The goals and objectives were planned and positive outcomes were anticipated based on the achievement of the expected end results, proper use of the evaluation tools, and the success students would demonstrate proving their ability to accomplish the standards of achievement. First, more time was granted and more opportunities were offered for the second grade students to improve their quality of writing and language. Secondly, the students were provided with more and various child-centered materials, educational activities and experiences which were expected to increase their quantity of writing. The final goal was that the students were involved in an integrated literacy/language arts program - in a uniquely child-centered environment - that provided many and various opportunities for them to learn through active, enjoyable, cooperative involvement in an attempt to improve their reading attitude.

Behavioral Objectives

OBJECTIVE ONE: Twenty of the twenty-four students were to achieve higher scores on a teacher-made quality of writing assessment tool at the end of the eight-month implementation

period than they did at the beginning of school.

OBJECTIVE TWO: Twenty of the twenty-four students were to achieve higher scores on a teacher-made quantity of writing assessment tool at the end of the eight-month implementation period than they did at the beginning of school.

OBJECTIVE THREE: Twenty of the twenty-four students were to develop a more positive attitude toward reading at the end of the eight-month implementation period than they had at the beginning of school.

Measurement of Objectives

Objectives were to be measured by means of assessment tools (see Appendix A). The quality of writing assessment test was utilized the first and last week of the practicum. The students were required to submit to this writer their "favorite writing" accomplished that particular week. This writer evaluated each child's work using the teacher-made quality of writing assessment tool, based on standards for evaluating children's writing (Cramer, 1982, p. 91-93). When a student submitted a narrative writing, the work was graded "low", "middle", or "high" in the following areas: (a) story structure, (b) story setting, (c) story characters,

(d) story conversation, and (e) story idea. When the students submitted an expository writing, the work was graded "low", "middle", or "high" in the following areas: (a) quality of ideas, (b) quality of organization, (c) selection of words, (d) structure of sentences, and (e) structure of paragraph. Both narrative and expository work was graded "low", "middle" or "high" on mechanical skills, since they were essentially the same for both materials. Subdivisions for the mechanical skills were: (a) grammar and usage, (b) punctuation, (c) capitalization, (d) spelling, and (e) handwriting/neatness. An example of the standards used for evaluating story structure being: (a) "Low" - No identifiable beginning, middle, or end. Story problem unclear. (b) "Middle" - Beginning, middle, and end present, but not always identifiable. Story problem presented, but not completely developed. (c) "High" - Identifiable beginning, middle, and end. Characters were introduced and problem presented. A similar evaluative hierarchy was used for each of the other criteria as listed above.

The assessment tool for evaluating the children's quanity of writing was utilized the first and last week of the practicum. The children were allowed five minutes to think and write a story. The teacher counted the amount of words used. By the end of school, it was anticipated that an increase in the number of words used would be shown.

The assessment tool used for measuring attitude toward reading was administered by this writer, the first and last week of the practicum. The students were given the Elementary Attitude Survey (McKenna & Kear, 1990). Written permission was granted by United Feature Syndicate, Incorporated for the use of this survey. This permission was stated on page two of the survey. McKenna & Kear (1990) stated, "Our purpose was to produce a public-domain instrument that would . . . enable teachers to estimate attitude level efficiently and reliably" (p.627). The survey consisted of 20 items and a short, simply-worded statement about reading. These statements were followed by four pictures of Garfield (the cartoon character). His four poses showed him in various emotional states - from very happy to very sad. The students were assured that there were "no" correct answers, that this was not a test, and that they were to mark their true feelings (not as Garfield might respond). Students circled Garfield's pictures for their answers. Very happy Garfield got four points, slightly smiling Garfield got three points, mildly upset Garfield got two points, and the very upset Garfield got one point. After the teacher read the survey to the children and their responses were marked, the survey was informally scored. For example, a total score of 50 occurred between slightly smiling and mildly upset Garfield and showed a relatively indifferent attitude toward reading.

Besides the above mentioned assessment tools, there were many and various other means for measuring the students' achievement throughout the practicum. The teacher and students kept weekly Language Arts Activities "In Brief" sheets, which had an accompanying number code sheet. This assessment tool was filled out and discussed briefly with the children, each morning. Therefore, the students and the teacher knew what they had chosen as their language arts assignment for the day. Projects - both individual and small group were evaluated. Students' journals were kept and shared with the teacher and total group. Children wrote stories, letters, lists, notes, reports, and poems. They shared them with different audiences. The students kept two portfolios each - a draft portfolio and a revising portfolio, which were monitored frequently by the teacher. Plays, puppet show, skits, choral reading, songs, poetry, and VCR tapes were planned, accomplished, and presented by individuals and small groups of children to the total group and observed by the teacher. A class chart was made and kept showing the number of books the children read each week at home. The teacher conducted mini-lessons with small groups of children that needed extra help in learning certain skills. Grading was primarily narrative. Occasionally, mandated skills tests were administered for diagnostic purposes. The teacher conducted individual and small group conferences to evaluate how well the children were mastering the strategies (skills)

to solve problems in reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

This writer kept a log and recorded daily events. Outcomes of anticipated and unanticipated happenings and evaluation results were recorded. Based on the students' written work, oral presentations, assessment tools, surveys and teacher observations, standards of achievement were set and measured.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

The major problem was that second graders were not receiving support for their literacy and language growth that was developmentally appropriate. The possibilities of solving the problem have been dealt with in educational literature. Anrig & Lapointe (1989) stated, "To improve student performance, districts should help teachers examine their instruction from the view of what students actually experience, promote high-order thinking skills, engage students in active learning, and encourage more parent involvement" (p.4). All of these strategies were implemented and proved quite rewarding.

The children were engaged in many and various hands-on, child-centered experiences. They worked in a child-centered environment. They were involved in many reading, writing, and oral language activities that required the use of thinking deeply while actively participating. The children were read to often. The parents were informed of the program via letter (see Appendix B). Their support and participation were encouraged. Parents were invited and did accompany the class on field trips. They had lunch with the class, orally shared highlights of their careers and other experiences, attended class presentations, and occasionally acted as tutors.

Both the parents and the students found these experiences to be enjoyable and rewarding.

Paris & Jacobs (1984) averred, "Teachers can supplement their lessons on reading by teaching children the declarative, procedural, and conditional aspects of reading strategies that might help children to comprehend better what they read and to be more motivated to read on their own" (p.2092). Although students' motivation for learning is an internal phenomenon, motivation was highly influenced by hands-on experiences, external situations and conditions. Curiosity was developed as a response to new or contradictory situations, thoughts, and beliefs. Through motivation, the learners appeared to value learning, enjoyed the learning process and took pride in the outcomes of their writings, projects, and presentations. The students were praised often and earned awards and rewards.

Schedules were rearranged; thus, the children were allowed more time for thinking, planning, and active involvement. They were involved in individual, total group, and small group activities. Group work had a positive effect on concept development and achievement. It appeared that the students achieved more when they were exposed to tasks that required them to make cooperative decisions. A balance of cooperative, competitive, and individual experiences positively influenced the students' social, emotional, and intellectual development.

Classroom collections of real literature, records, tapes, and stuffed animals were enlarged. Various classroom centers for reading/writing, listening, and sharing were set up and visited daily. These centers were changed or added to every six weeks. Individual, small and large group projects, skits, and plays were prepared and presented to audiences other than the children's own class. The students were allowed to make reading and writing choices of their own, often. They were allowed to write in various modes and to visit the library often to work with the computers. Brainstorming, mapping, webbing, modeling, and sharing presentations and "written stories" were ongoing. The students kept their own portfolios, which greatly enhanced their organizational skills. They worked in a child-centered, cooperative, well supervised and structured classroom, in which a variety of educational experiences and activities were enjoyed. These were just a few important strategies that were implemented in an attempt to solve the problem. All of these strategies proved to be helpful in accomplishing the expected positive results.

Description of Selected Solution

This writer was prepared to try many possible solutions to the problem. Based on literature findings, the children were given many and various child-centered, hands-on

experiences, materials, projects, and real literature. The classroom was planned and arranged to offer the children the best possible child-centered environment. The language arts program was integrated, with a strong emphasis on writing, listening, and speaking. The students were given more time to cooperatively think, read, share, and enjoy learning. They gave presentations to many and various audiences and were involved in class decision-making and planning. The students were given positive reinforcement, rewards, and awards. They were praised often. They were graded narratively. Their progress was evaluated on the basis of active daily participation and effort, as well as teacher observation and practicum assessment tools. Motivation appeared to increase as the students felt more in control of the environment. They knew that their efforts would be rewarded and would have a significant impact on the success of a project, presentation, and/or situation. These young children exhibited the belief that performance (ability) could be improved by "working harder". This they did! The teacher worked with the children - individually, total group, and in mini-groups. Creativity was encouraged.

There are influences that enhance quality learning. Haertel, Walberg, and Wang (1990) concluded, ". . . those identified as most important to good learning outcomes are student metacognition, effective classroom management, quantity of instruction, positive and productive student/ teacher interactions, a classroom climate conducive to

learning, and a peer culture supportive of academic achievement"(p.37). Much attention and consideration were given to these "influences" while planning and implementing the successful solution to this problem.

Report of Action Taken

Permission was granted by the school's principal to implement the practicum,using school supplies, facilities, and materials. The principal and assistant principal were very helpful in supplying any supplementary materials and supplies that were needed. Film strips, tapes, trade books, magazines, music materials, and art supplies that were available were eagerly furnished. If not on hand, they were ordered. The administrators appeared proud of the students' accomplishments.

The music, art, and physical education teachers and librarian were very accommodating. Often they adjusted their lesson plans and schedules to assist in the success of projects. The extra time and attention that they showed this class was appreciated and proved rewarding.

In attempting to solve this problem, this writer implemented many and various strategies. A successful effort was exerted to have the students attend special classes in the afternoon. In the morning, the first half hour was spent writing in students' and teacher's journals on topics of choice or content area topics. The teacher kept a log of expected and unexpected happenings, also. The next

half hour was spent planning and discussing the day's activities and schedules. Language Activities sheets were briefly reviewed with each child by the teacher. A large class chart showing the books read at home was marked. Talking, brainstorming for writing topics, mapping, webbing, modeling, and sharing with the total group "written stories" were ongoing. Besides total group activities, the children worked individually. They were encouraged to work in pairs and in small groups, visit the reading/writing center, listening station and other centers often, read non-basal literature, and visit the library to play educational language arts computer games. The children worked on projects in the science/health/social studies center, enjoyed the math center, had mini-lessons and conferences with the teacher. They planned and presented skits, plays, choral and poetry reading. They were allowed more time to browse through the library corner and share a book or favorite story with a friend or friends. The above activities were taking place during two whole hours on two days and for just the last hour on three days a week (due to having basal reading groups the first hour). Having this two hour time block for reading/language arts proved rewarding. An extra half hour of each day was devoted to writing drafts, proofreading, revising the drafts, rewriting, sharing the finished products and students maintaining their own portfolios for drafts and revising drafts. A "special"

half hour each day was spent listening to the teacher read a non-basal book or a chapter from a child's literature magazine.

Charts were posted regarding conduct rules, rewards, and consequences and a schedule showing group rotation for activities (weekly - color coded). With the assistance of the teacher, an aide, and occasionally a parent or parents, five children of mixed ability and of different sex, in each of five groups were able to successfully accomplish each day's planned, integrated, child-centered language arts experiences.

The classroom library book collection increased from one book per week to five books per week for each child. The records and story tapes were changed weekly, instead of every two weeks and the collections were enlarged. More art supplies were added to the art and craft center. Unique and interesting articles were brought in to motivate interest - such as, unusual stamps, seashells, plastic dinosaurs, and dolls representing other countries.

The children were allowed to work on projects of their choice, as well as assigned projects. They were encouraged and expected to write in many and various modes. They constructed a huge cardboard mailbox and painted it red, white, and blue. It resembled a real postal box. Letters and notes were deposited daily in this box and were delivered every Friday, by children who took turns being mail carriers.

Each child had a shoe box with a light-weight rope handle on the lid, labeled "My Writing Suitcase". It contained the writing (art) supplies that he/she needed for writing and decorating their work. Many of the letters that they wrote were actually mailed. They wrote thank you notes to companies that sent them free materials for writing projects. One company sent a free "Story Starter" game for every child in the class. The day that these games arrived, the school secretary, the students, and this writer were overwhelmed by this company's generosity. Free literature and materials helped to enhance the children's literacy and language development and helped to improve their motivation. Their attitude toward reading and writing improved daily.

Due to unexpected events and spin-offs more reading and writing occurred. The school superintendent recommended that students write get well cards to a seven year old boy in Surry, England who had a brain tumor and little time to live. His dream was to be entered in the Guiness Book of World Records for receiving the largest number of get well cards by an individual. The children wrote and decorated lovely get well cards and sent them to him. Due to the outbreak of the war in the Middle East, the students' interest was aroused. Current events were brought in and shared. The class wrote letters and made beautiful Valentine cards for the troops. They collected similar articles from many other

classes in the school. The students initiated this project. They collected all the articles and mailed them (three, full boxes). This was one of five total school projects that the class actively participated in.

Due to an increase in the kindergarten population, classrooms with bathrooms were needed. This writer's and another teacher's classrooms were the last two rooms with bathrooms left on the primary wing. Thus, both classes were required to move into two newly constructed portables on campus. The portables were larger than the regular classrooms. Each portable had two closets and bookshelves lining two walls. This move was a "windfall" for the class! The classrooms appeared to be "bursting at the seams"! Projects and materials took lots of room. The extra storage space was needed and greatly appreciated.

Besides the regular aide, the class was fortunate in having the assistance of a parent-aide. She was unable to remain throughout the duration of the practicum, however her effort and support proved quite beneficial to the students during the weeks that she was with them.

Another unexpected event was a conference sponsored by a university (Nova), concerning language and literacy. This writer attended. The conference dealt with issues pertaining to this practicum. Ideas were brought back, shared with teachers, and implemented with the class.

The students started the practicum with five stuffed

animals - mascots for each of the five groups. Eagerly, they were checked out each afternoon from the teacher and returned the next morning. The students carried them home each night and wrote stories that the animals wanted to tell. These journal stories were shared orally the next day. This activity was so overwhelmingly enjoyed and proved so rewarding that enough stuffed animals were secured to nightly accommodate each child. Many parents and teachers expressed a high interest in this strategy to improve "at home" interest and involvement in reading and writing.

The students made a tall "speaking stool" to sit on and a cute microphone to speak into, which they used when speaking orally to the total group. They built a cardboard stage, painted, and decorated it. They made sock puppets, wrote, and presented their own puppet shows. Each child made his/her own little Editor's writing visor that was worn during the period of the day when the draft and revising work was being accomplished.

The children took three field trips. They were chaperoned by parents and the teacher. They enjoyed a play at a large cultural arts center in metropolitan downtown. After the play, they got to talk with the preformers and feel the costumes, grease paint, and props. They participated in on-campus swimming classes. They took their final swimming test in an Olympic-size pool, at a local junior college. With the exception of one, all the children successfully

passed. The class attended the county youth fair. Many of their projects were exhibited. They were very proud of this acknowledgment. Many of their science projects were exhibited in the school's big science fair, also. Before and after the field trips and exhibits, the children read many books and articles concerning these experiences and wrote stories about them. They made wise choices in their "project work".

Two big pumpkins were brought to school and the children were allowed time to clean and crave them and make scary jack-o-lanterns. The seeds were roasted by the teacher and shared with the children. The teacher shared a pumpkin pie. Popcorn was prepared and shared in class. The students made decorations and trimmed a huge class Christmas tree. They formed their own band and presented holiday songs and dances. They made their own paper costumes and gave presentations to other classes and to the parents. They enjoyed dressing in costumes depictive of their favorite book characters and gave a "Book Character" parade around the school. They filled holiday can goods baskets for the needy during Thanksgiving and Christmas. The children enjoyed acting as troubadours on Valentine's Day. They wrote their own Valentine poems, visited, and shared them with other classes. The other teachers were very cooperative with these shared experiences. Both classes enjoyed and appeared to profit from these presentations. Several classes reciprocrated, by visiting and sharing presentations with our class. Nature walks and a sprinkler -picnic party added to these child-centered experiences.

The students worked in a well supervised, but less restrictive classroom. They were allowed to move around, share with a friend, make choices of their own, and feel proud of themselves. They were anxious to read their own writings in the class monthly newspaper that was sent home to the parents and a copy posted in the library.

They were delighted in becoming pen pals with a fifth grade class and shared weekly letters. Each week, the quality of their writing showed improvement and the quantity of the words increased - for both classes. The other teacher seemed to appreciate the fact that they chose this particular fifth grade class with which to share this learning experience.

The class became actively involved in two special reading programs - Book-It and CORe (Count on Reading). They became members of the Troll Book Club and purchased their own little paperback books. In the spring, they participated in a Florida State Readers'Association project. Among approximately twenty new books, they voted and help judge the best five books appreciated by primary students. The teacher read two or three books to the children each day, until the class had heard all the books. Three of the five votes that the class casted won.

The children edited and illustrated their own class BIG BOOKS. These two BIG BOOKS represented the students' best work, conscientious effort and cooperative learning. The pages were laminated and well bound. Upon completion, they were

read by individuals and small groups daily. Through happy learning experiences such as these, the children seemed to begin to realize that writing is an important way of expressing oneself and is "thought and speech" on paper.

The children delighted in observing the ant farm, working with microscopes, and magnifying glasses. They worked with clay, craved soap, painted with watercolors, made finger paintings, and dyed Easter eggs. Occasionally, live animals were brought to school. The children read non-basal literature and wrote journal articles about these child-centered experiences. Each child secured a library card.

They constructed and painted a cardboard television set. This was used often to enhance oral expression. Each child was given a strip of butcher block paper. It was folded in three parts for a sequence story. The stories were illustrated and the sentences were written under the pictures. The pictures were spliced together and each child read his own story as it appeared on the television. They produced many television shows. This was great for small groups projects.

The children made booklets of famous Americans. They worked with rulers, yard sticks, and various measuring utensils - such as, scales and empty containers (quart, pint, liter, and cups). With the help of fifth grade tutors, the children made a huge neighborhood bulletin board map with streets and individual small paper homes on them. The homes were labeled with the students' names, addresses, and

phone numbers.

In little milk cartons, the students planted lima beans and Marigold seeds. They kept records of the plants' progress. They observed the growth of sweet potatoes, carrots, and huge Mango seeds in jars. As they sprouted and grew, the children felt a sense of pride and accomplishment.

Parental involvement was encouraged. It increased as the practicum progressed. Not only did parents act as chaperones on field trips, but they often visited the class impromptu. They observed the children at work. The parents appeared to like what they saw taking place - especially the active involvement. A few parents spoke with the students about topics of their interest. This helped to generate new project ideas. The parents seemed to enjoy hearing the children read their favorite writings - especially their own child's! Occasionally, a parent served as a small group tutor. The parents' expressed appreciation for the list of how they could enrich their child's reading/writing experience at home. This list was given to them by the teacher. Several parents attended the "end-of-school" sprinkler/picnic party.

The children were given the quality and quantity of writing tests and reading attitude survey. These second graders' literacy and language development had definitely been nurtured through child-centered versus curriculum-centered experiences. The positive tests and survey results reflected the value and importance of a child-centered curriculum - filled with many and various experiences - for primary students.

Chapter V

RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results

OBJECTIVE ONE: TWENTY OF THE TWENTY-FOUR STUDENTS WERE TO ACHIEVE HIGHER SCORES ON A TEACHER-MADE QUALITY OF WRITING ASSESSMENT TOOL AT THE END OF THE EIGHT-MONTH IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD THAN THEY DID AT THE BEGINNING OF SCHOOL.

Comparison of the quality of writing pre and post test results indicated that narrative and expository composing and mechanical skills showed a profound increase upward from low to high as their vocabulary, use of strategies, and reading/writing skills improved and developed (see Table 5).

OBJECTIVE TWO: TWENTY OF THE TWENTY-FOUR STUDENTS WERE TO ACHIEVE HIGHER SCORES ON A TEACHER-MADE QUANTITY OF WRITING ASSESSMENT TOOL AT THE END OF THE EIGHT-MONTH IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD THAN THEY DID AT THE BEGINNING OF SCHOOL.

Comparison of the quantity of writing results indicated a positive increase in the number of written words (see Table 6). Written words increased as more time was allowed for thinking, planning, making choices, and performing; and through motivation.

Table 5

Mean Number of Responses of Twenty-four Second Graders Based on a Pre/Post Quality of Writing Assessment Test

Entries	Pretest			Post Test		
	Low	Middle	High	Low	Middle	High
Narrative Composing Skills						
Story structure	13	4	1	2	8	8
Story setting	12	4	2	3	9	6
Story characters	7	7	4	1	3	14
Story conversation	9	8	1	4	10	4
Story idea	7	9	2	0	3	15
Expository Composing Skills						
Quality of ideas	3	2	1	0	1	5
Quality of organization	4	2	0	1	2	3
Selection of words	3	3	0	0	0	6
Structure of sentences	3	2	1	0	2	4
Structure of paragraph	5	1	0	1	1	4
Narrative and Expository Mechanical Skills						
Grammar and usage	10	12	2	2	2	20
Punctuation	19	2	3	5	11	8
Capitalization	18	5	1	2	9	13
Spelling	7	15	2	2	8	14
Handwriting/Neatness	12	4	8	2	4	18

Note. Eighteen narrative and six expository pretest writers employed the same mode respectively for the post test.

Table 6

Mean Number of Written Words by Twenty-four Second Graders Based on a Five Minute Quantity of Writing Pre/Post Test

	Students	
Written Words	Pretest	Post Test
0-5	1	0
6-10	5	0
11-15	4	0
16-20	4	1
21-25	2	2
26-30	3	2
31-35	4	4
36-40	0	5
41-45	0	2
46-50	0	1
51-55	1	0
56-60	0	1
61-65	0	1
66-70	0	2
71-75	0	1
76-80	0	2
80+	0	0

OBJECTIVE THREE: TWENTY OF THE TWENTY-FOUR STUDENTS WERE TO DEVELOP A MORE POSITIVE ATTITUDE TOWARD READING AT THE END OF THE EIGHT-MONTH IMPLEMENTATION PERIOD THAN THEY HAD AT THE BEGINNING OF SCHOOL.

Comparison of the pre and post reading attitude surveys results revealed that the students had developed a strong positive attitude toward reading (see Table 7). Attitude improved as more independent control of learning occurred, self-esteem developed, and through child-centered experiences.

In summary, the quality of writing showed a profound increase upward from low to high. The quantity of writing indicated a positive increase in the number of written words. Attitude toward reading revealed a strong positive increase.

Conclusions

It was concluded, that second graders' literacy and language development excelled when nurtured through child-centered experiences. The students' quality of writing improved as they were exposed to many and various hands-on, child-centered activities and learning sources. Shanker (1986) explained, ". . . students learn differently from subject to subject. Some need intensive help from a variety of sources . . ." (p. 12). It was also noted that the fifth graders that assisted as tutors helped greatly in influencing the children's improvement in their quality of writing.

Table 7

Mean Number of Responses of Twenty-four Second Graders Based on a Twenty Entry Pre/Post Reading Attitude Survey

Entries	Pretest				Post Test			
	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D
HOW DO YOU FEEL:								
1. when you read a book on a rainy Saturday?	8	6	6	4	10	10	2	2
2. when you read a book in school during free time?	6	10	4	4	13	6	3	2
3. about reading for fun at home?	7	7	8	2	10	9	4	1
4. about getting a book for a present?	9	4	2	9	12	3	2	7
5. about free time reading?	8	2	7	7	13	5	1	5
6. about starting a new book?	7	10	2	5	15	5	2	2
7. about reading during summer vacation?	7	3	2	12	10	5	6	3
8. about reading instead of playing?	5	3	3	13	5	4	2	13
9. about going to a bookstore?	12	8	2	2	17	3	2	2
10. about reading different kinds of books?	12	9	2	1	20	2	1	1

(table continues)

Entries	Pretest				Post Test			
	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D
HOW DO YOU FEEL:								
11. when the teacher asks you questions about what you read?	11	9	1	3	17	4	1	2
12. about doing reading work-book pages and worksheets?	10	7	4	3	7	6	4	7
13. about reading in school?	13	6	1	4	18	4	1	1
14. about reading your school books?	6	11	3	4	8	7	3	7
15. about learning from a book?	13	8	0	3	18	3	2	1
16. when it's time for reading class?	9	11	0	4	15	7	2	0
17. about the stories you read in reading class?	16	5	3	0	16	4	3	1
18. when you read out loud in class?	6	5	4	9	15	4	3	2
19. about using a dictionary?	10	11	2	1	20	2	1	1
20. about taking a reading test?	7	8	1	8	15	2	4	3

Note. A = Happiest Garfield - earned 4 points.

B = Slightly smiling Garfield - earned 3 points.

C = Mildly upset Garfield - earned 2 points.

D = Very upset Garfield - earned 1 point.

100 = Possible total score. 50 = Relatively indifferent attitude.

Jenkins & Jenkins (1987) averred, ". . . using tutors as young as seven, eight, and nine, fifth- and sixth-graders are generally preferred as tutors because they are easier to train, require less supervision, and are better able to manage discipline problems" (p. 67). In this well-structured, closely supervised classroom, the "buddy system" and peer tutoring were successful.

The students were exposed to a wide variety of non-basal books, magazines, literature, reading records, and tapes. As their vocabulary increased so did the quantity (and quality) of their written words. Butterfield, Eldredge, & Quinn (1990) suggested, ". . . that wide reading influences general vocabulary growth more than vocabulary instruction increases reading comprehension, at least at the second grade level" (p. 211). The extra time allowed the children for reading/ writing, mini-lessons, narrative grading, and teacher/ student conferences greatly enhanced their quantity of writing. George (1987) emphasized the importance of building and maintaining quality rapport with those supervised. Thus, the children were praised often. They were given awards and rewards. They appeared to strive diligently not only to please themselves, but the teacher as well.

Students' attitude toward reading improved as they became more actively involved in the classroom learning environment, encouraged to participate, and directly praised for their successes and responses. Beare, Wasson, & Wasson (1990) cited, "The teachers should provide emotional and instructional

support designed to generate students' willingness to try" (p.165). The teacher's, parents', administrators', other teachers' and students' interest and support of the class' projects, performances, reading/writing activities, field trips, and other child-centered experiences strongly helped to arouse and improve the children's attitude toward reading/writing and learning. Siegel (1990) emphasized, ". . . the responsibility of parents, educators, and the students themselves to provide, participate in, and support the kinds of educational experiences that result in high levels of reading achievement" (p. 346). It was noted that their attitude toward writing (and reading) increased more sharply when their parents and fellow students showed their interest. Attitude in reading and interest in writing were significantly influenced by environmental factors. Soltis & Walberg (1989) explained, "Subjects who had seen adults making lists, keeping diaries, and working crossword puzzles had a greater interest in writing than those subjects who had not" (p.25).

It is concluded that the goals that were set for this practicum were successfully achieved due primarily to the active, enjoyable, child-centered (and in many cases hands-on) experiences that have truly nurtured their literacy and language development. Also, a personal goal that was so often dreamed has been accomplished. Many other teachers may dream the same dream and some have or will obtain it. One such teacher/writer Maxim (1991) wrote, "As a teacher, I can do something that no commercial program can ever

accomplish: allow students' individual interests to become a catalyst for their involvement in their own learning" (p. 42). "Individual interest" pursuit proved very rewarding!

In summary, it was concluded that many and various child-centered experiences, activities, and learning sources nurtured second graders' literacy and language development. Students learn differently from subject to subject. Some students needed intensive help from a variety of sources. Fifth grade tutors helped greatly in influencing the students' quality of writing, because they were easy to train, required less supervision, and were better able to manage discipline problems than seven, eight, and nine year olds. Even though, this particular second grade class worked very well together employing the "buddy system" and peer tutoring.

Exposure to a wide variety of non-basal literature helped to increase their vocabulary and quantity of written words. Extra time allowed for reading/writing, mini-lessons, narrative grading, and teacher/student conferences enhanced their quantity of writing. Through praise, awards and rewards the teacher built and maintained quality rapport with the children, which appeared to strengthen their efforts to strive harder to achieve.

Through active involvement, encouragement to participate, and praise, the teacher provided emotional and instructional support which attributed to their willingness to try. The students exhibited a more positive attitude toward reading

when adults and peers showed their interest and support. Also, attitude improved when more time was granted and they were allowed to become involved in learning based primarily on their own individual interests and experiences.

Recommendations

1. The basal text is a base; it is not a complete reading program. It needs the support of literature and literary, child-centered experiences.
2. Students should be allowed to be more active (rather than reactive) and involved participants in their learning experiences.
3. Students should be offered many and various educational experiences and activities that require autonomy, self-direction, and creative expression.
4. Students need to be taught flexible strategies to use in monitoring and directing their own learning. However, "cooperative activities" allow the children to learn how to assimilate other learning strategies from their peers.
5. A daily two-hour block for Reading/Language Arts should be mandated to accommodate students' needs.
6. Parents play an indispensable role in the development of children's literacy. Parents and schools should find many ways of becoming mutually supportive partners in the literacy movement.

This writer plans are to continue using the basal text as a base for the reading program, while supporting it with many and various non-basal literature/materials and child-centered, hands-on experiences. The children will be allowed active involvement in their learning experiences.Educational experiences and activities will continue to be offered that will require autonomy, self-direction, and creative expression. Through total and mini-group lessons, individual conferences, modeling, and narrative grading the children will be taught flexible strategies to use in monitoring and directing their own learning. "Cooperative activities" and project work will continue. When new learning problems arise, children often learn how to assimilate other learning strategies from other students. A strong attempt will be exerted to secure a daily two-hour block for Reading/Language Arts. Children need this expanded time to think, read, write, share orally, actively participate, pursue individual interests, and enjoy learning. Parental involvement will continue to be encouraged. New and different "at home" projects and ideas will be offered to the parents as a means of stimulating their involvement in supporting their child's literacy and language development. Parents will always be welcomed in the classroom. Whenever possible, their participation as tutors and chaperones will be appreciated.

Dissemination

As the practicum progressed, the administrators and teachers (especially the second grade teachers) appeared interested in the students' written work, projects, and activities. This writer often shared the students' written work at teachers' meetings and even in the teachers' lounge. Teachers were very cooperative in allowing the students to share and give presentation in their classrooms. The students in both classes seemed to profit and enjoy this experience. Often teachers visited the classroom. They appeared amazed at how well the children were learning to read and write, implement reading/writing strategies, and how eager and enthusiastic the children were to read and write. The children enjoyed sharing their writing portfolios and projects with visiting teachers. They were complimented and praised often by this writer and visitors.

Several parents visited the classroom and watched the children at work. They appeared most impressed with the active involvement. A few parents helped to generate new project ideas, by speaking with the class about topics of their interest. Some parents served as chaperones. Occasionally, a parent would tutor the students. One parent helped for several weeks. Parental involvement was encouraged and appreciated.

The regular classroom aide became so enthusiastic about the children's progress, that many nights she took the

children's written work to narratively grade. This was not requested or required of her. Even on her "breaks", she often stopped by to offer her assistance. The art, music, and physical education teachers were supportive by rearranging their daily schedules occasionally to meet the children's needs. A fifth grade teacher was eager and appeared appreciative that her class was chosen to share the "pen pal" experience with the children. She and other fifth grade teachers were accommodating in allowing several of their students to act as tutors. The principal and assistant principal appeared proud of the students' accomplishments. Any supplementary materials and supplies that were needed and not available were ordered. A substitute teacher (who was at the school often) was so impressed with the progress the students were making in reading and writing and the way that the children were implementing the skill strategies that she interviewed the teacher for a university class assignment and received the highest possible points on her paper. We were both proud of this! The total school showed its support of the practicum by actively participating in the total school projects.

Recently, the area reading specialist gave a presentation at this writer's school. Many elementary teachers in this area attended. After the meeting, the specialist was invited to visit this writer's classroom. She appeared quite impressed with the reading/writing program, the children's work, and

the child-centered appearance of the room. She was given some of the children's written work to take with her. She had mentioned that she would like to share it with other elementary school teachers. She asked this writer to consider giving a "special" presentation concerning this practicum to other teachers at one of the area reading meetings, this fall. It was agreed.

A copy of the practicum will be given to the public school library in which this writer teaches. It will be placed in the teachers' section of the library. The students' BIG BOOKS will be placed in the library, also. Someday, when they are much older - they may enjoy coming back to this school, remembering their child-centered experiences, and reading the books that they wrote in the second grade!

* * *

Based primarily upon observations, evaluations, and the success of this practicum, the principal nominated the teacher to instruct in a recently established, well structured, innovative educational program, starting this fall. The program is designed to enhance learning strategies and thinking skills of high ability minority children and to strengthen their chance of entry in the gifted program the following year. This writer is proud to be one of fifty-two teachers in the county that was specially selected and appointed for this position and task.

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Appendix A

Evaluation Instruments

PRE/POST QUALITY OF WRITING SKILLS

ASSESSMENT TOOL

DIRECTIONS: The teacher will check the levels of each student's written work.

Composing Skills for Narrative Writing

	LOW	MIDDLE	HIGH
Story structure			
Story setting			
Story characters			
Story conversation			
Story idea			

Composing Skills for Expository Writing

	LOW	MIDDLE	HIGH
Quality of ideas			
Quality of organization . . .			
Selection of words			
Structure of sentences			
Structure of paragraph			

Mechanical Skills for Narrative and Expository Materials

	LOW	MIDDLE	HIGH
Grammar and usage			
Punctuation			
Capitalization			
Spelling			
Handwriting/Neatness			

Note. This assessment tool is derived from the Cramer Scale. (Cramer, 1982, p. 91).

PRE/POST

QUANTITY OF WRITING ASSESSMENT TOOL

DIRECTIONS: In five minutes, think and write about a story that you have heard or read. You may write your own story, if you wish.

_____
(Title)

LANGUAGE ARTS ACTIVITIES "IN BRIEF"

WEEK OF _____

DIRECTIONS: Next to your name, fill out your chosen daily activity or activities, using the attached Number Code.

STUDENT'S NAME	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY

LANGUAGE ARTS ACTIVITIES "IN BRIEF"

NUMBER CODE

1. Planning
2. Drafting
3. Revising
4. Editing
5. Publishing
6. Reading
7. Preparing for sharing
8. Reading conference
9. Writing conference
10. Choosing book(s)
11. Work on project
12. Work with peer tutor
13. Play games (computer, board, etc.)
14. Visit the library
15. Visit "listening station"
16. Visit activity center:

_____

17. Share with other class(es)
18.
19.
20.

Comments:

Appendix B

Letter to Parents

Dear Parents,

This letter is to inform you of an implementation of new teaching procedures for Language Arts in my class for successive quarters this year. I am currently pursuing a doctoral degree in Early and Middle Childhood and I am basing the changes on current research findings. Children need more time to develop the skills introduced to them in class. They also need to develop these skills within the context of usage, through reading real literature, working on their own chosen projects and writing about them.

Our daily schedule has been arranged to allow us the opportunity to spend a large portion of the day devoted to Language Arts - reading, writing, spelling, and English. The basal reader, Spelling and English books will be used as resources and to teach short "mini-lessons". There will be little or no homework in these books. The children will be allowed time to visit the library more often, work with peer tutors, plan, read, write, make and present individual and group projects - to share with many audiences.

Grades will be determined in Language Usage and Spelling through writing. Grading will be primarily narrative. Reading grades will be based on thinking displayed through journals, draft work, and oral discussions. A portion of the grade

will also come from cooperatively following class procedures regarding individual and group activities, maintaining work folders, and adhering to conduct rules. Occasionally skills tests will be administered for diagnostic purposes. Skills found to be lacking will be taught. Your child and I will work together to set reading and writing goals for him/her individually.

It is my belief that learning in this manner will be a more pleasant and less pressured experience. It will be geared to your child as an individual. You can help by encouraging your child to have a book to read each day. You can help him/her pick an appropriate book. I will be working on this at school, also. Another way to help is to praise your child's writing efforts. Be as helpful as you can. Talk to your child about writing ideas and help discover what it is that he/she is trying to say. When your child asks for help with spelling, punctuation, and usage, supply that help. Listen to your child tell about his/her writing, read it, but please resist the temptation to do it yourself. A child's writing should be his/her own work.

I will be happy to answer questions at your child's conference or you can call me at school. I'm looking forward to a literate year for our class.

Sincerely,

(Mrs.) Gwendolyn Esch